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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MANILA 005038

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR S/CT(RHONDA SHORE) AND EAP/MTS  
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO AND J5  
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (TOOLAN/BAILEY)  
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES: 2006 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

¶1. (U) Summary. The Philippines, one of the earliest supporters in the global coalition against terrorism, continues to cooperate with the United States on bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism efforts. In 2006, ninety-three bombings occurred in the Philippines from improvised explosive devices, grenades, and landmines. The Armed Forces of the Philippines launched on August 1 an ongoing operation codenamed "Operation Ultimatum" against leading members of the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah on Jolo Island. The Anti-Terrorism Task Force arrested, captured, or killed 88 suspected terrorists, and seized over 900 kilograms of explosive materials. Philippine authorities also made progress in tracking, blocking, and seizing terrorists' assets. Nevertheless, major evidentiary and procedural obstacles in the Philippines continue to hinder the building of effective terrorism cases, and a large and growing case backlog and the absence of continuous, contiguous trials for terrorism cases are impediments to the Philippines' prosecution of suspected terrorists. The House of Representatives in April approved a draft counterterrorism bill, while the Senate continues to deliberate on a different version. End Summary.

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GENERAL ASSESSMENT  
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¶2. (U) The Philippines, one of the earliest supporters in the global coalition against terrorism, continues to cooperate closely with the United States on bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism efforts.

¶3. (U) The Philippines faces numerous threats from terrorism. Operating within the country are the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), all of which the U.S. Government has designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). In addition, the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) and the Pentagon Gang are on the U.S. Terrorist Exclusion List. Embassy has also recommended inclusion of yet another local group on the FTO list -- the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) -- and this proposal remains under consideration.

¶4. (U) In 2006, 93 bombings and 28 non-criminal mechanical explosions left 65 persons dead and 258 injured in the Philippines, according to the Philippine National Police (PNP) Bomb Data Center. According to PNP, 35 bombings were the result of improvised explosive devices, 50 from grenades, and eight from landmines. PNP investigations established the

motives for 16 of the 93 bombings as terrorism, while 35 stemmed from vandalism, ten for "revenge," two for "political" reasons, and one for "personal" reasons. The motives for the remaining 29 bombings remain unknown.

15. (U) In February, the bombing of a videoke bar located near a Philippine military base on Jolo Island left one dead and 22 injured. During March, a bomb exploded at the Sulu Consumers' Cooperative on Jolo, killing nine people and injuring 20. In June, a roadside bombing in Shariff Aguak killed three people and injured eight. In August, two bombs exploded almost simultaneously in Kidapawan City, injuring three people. In September, a bomb exploded at a public market in General Santos City, killing two people and injuring six. In October, a bomb exploded near the headquarters of the Sulu PNP in Jolo, injuring two persons. Also in October, three bombs exploded in Tacurong, Sultan Kudurat; Makilala, North Cotabato; and Cotabato City, killing eight people and injuring over 30.

16. (U) Philippine authorities recovered 36 IEDs/IED components, 145 military ordnance/vintage bombs, and 11 explosive ingredients during 2006. Nineteen bomb threats/hoaxes and one theft of explosives also occurred in 2006, according to PNP data.

17. (U) Philippine authorities had a number of successes against terrorists in 2006. On March 10, Philippine authorities arrested ASG member Ali Ambing in Valenzuela City, north of Manila, for his involvement in the February 2004 Superferry 14 bombing and an October 2002 bombing in Zamboanga that killed U.S. Army SFC Mark Wayne Jackson. On March 12 and April 29, Philippine security forces arrested ASG Commander Burham Sali and ASG member Abdusalih Dimah,

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respectively, for their involvement in the murders of U.S. citizens Martin Burnham and Guillermo Sobero and several Filipino hostages during the Dos Palmas kidnapping in 2001. On April 24, Philippine authorities arrested Al-Sharie Amiruddin in Zamboanga City for his involvement in the Dos Palmas and Sipadan kidnappings. On October 3, Philippine authorities captured Istiada Oemar Sovie, the Indonesian wife of wanted Bali bomber-JI terrorist Dulmatin, and deported her to Indonesia on November 30. On November 13, Philippine authorities arrested JI-trained bomber Blah Platon in Tacurong, Sultan Kudurat. On November 24, Philippine authorities arrested ASG member Annik Abbas in Basilan. On November 30, Philippine authorities arrested Delos Reyes, one of the founding members of the RSM and a suspect in the 2003 Awang Airport bombing. According to Philippine officials, the Anti-Terrorism Task Force (ATTF) arrested, captured, or killed a total of 88 suspected terrorists in 2006. However, Philippine courts made no convictions of terrorists in 2006, compared to at least eight convictions in 2005. The ATTF also coordinated operations that led, in October and November, to seizures of over 900 kilograms of ammonium nitrate and 100 bomb detonators/devices in Zamboanga City.

18. (U) Philippine military forces killed several key ASG figures during armed encounters. On April 3, the Philippine military killed ASG commander in Basilan Province, Romy Akilan, and his brother, Patta Akilan, on Sacol Island, off Zamboanga City. On April 11, Philippine military forces killed ASG Urban Terrorist Group leader Amihamja Ajijul, a.k.a. Alex Alvarez, near Zamboanga City. On August 29, Philippine military forces killed Ibrahim Salem during a raid of an ASG hideout in Sultan Kudurat, Maguindanao. On November 6, Philippine military forces in Zamboanga Del Sur Province killed Tajajul Ampul, a suspect in dozens of kidnappings and a 2001 raid on a rubber plantation in Basilan that led to the beheading of eleven farmers. During an ongoing AFP operation launched on August 1 -- codenamed "Operation Ultimatum" -- Philippine military forces have so far killed at least 31 members of the ASG, including Ismin Sahiron, the son of ASG Commander Radullah Sahiron, and

captured seven others.

¶9. (U) U.S. and Philippines authorities worked closely during 2006 on rewards programs targeting terrorist groups. The U.S. Department of State paid \$100,000 in January through its Rewards for Justice Program to an informant who led to the capture of Totting Craft Hanno, an ASG terrorist under U.S. indictment for his role in the Burnham kidnappings. In May, the U.S. Department of State Rewards for Justice Program made a payment of \$500,000 to two informants for their roles in the capture of RSM founder/leader Hilairon Del Rosario Santos. Using its rewards program, the U.S. Department of Defense made a \$50,000 payment in July to an informant who led to the capture of Gamal Baharan, a suspect in the February 14, 2005, bombings in Manila, Davao, and General Santos. The U.S. Department of Defense made other payments to informants whose information led to the capture of: Alex Kahal (\$7,500, February); Benhar Ismi (\$3,000, February); Abdulla Mohammad (\$5,000, February); Pio de Vera (\$30,000, July); Ahiri y Lipaie (\$3,000, July); Abdulgani Esmael Pagao (\$10,000, July); Amilhamja Ajijul, Sawari Asion, and Sabri Kamlon (\$40,000, October); and, Nasid Tahjid (\$7,000, November). Other payments were related to the seizure of two speedboats used by the ASG (\$10,000, October) and the recovery of IEDs in Jolo (\$1,800, December).

¶10. (U) Major evidentiary and procedural obstacles in the Philippines continue to hinder effective legal cases against terrorists, notably the absence of a law identifying terrorist acts and restrictions on gathering of evidence by electronic surveillance and other modern techniques. Major problems in the law enforcement and criminal justice systems also hamper bringing terrorists to justice in the Philippines, including corruption, low morale, inadequate salaries, recruitment and retention difficulties, lack of information technology upgrades, and inadequate cooperation between police and prosecutors.

¶11. (U) The Philippine government contributes fully to regional and international efforts to combat terrorist financing and strives to fulfill its responsibilities through the United Nations to detect and block the flow of funding to individuals and entities that support terrorism. The country is hampered somewhat in the implementation of these efforts

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because of its laws and legal system.

¶12. (U) The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC), operating under the Philippine Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2001 (AMLA), as amended in 2003, pursues the investigation and prosecution of money laundering and is the lead agency responsible for implementing the asset freeze measures called for by the UN Security Council 1267 Sanctions Committee. The Philippine government has signed and ratified all 12 international conventions and protocols related to terrorism, including those pertaining to the suppression of terrorist financing. The AMLA is the legislative basis for the implementation of the financial sanctions against al-Qaida and the Taliban. Under the current law, however, the AMLC cannot take direct action against suspected terrorists or those supporting terrorism, but must apply for a court order to inquire into bank accounts and direct the freezing of assets and transactions.

¶13. (U) In 2006, the Philippine government came closer to enacting new antiterrorism legislation. The House of Representatives approved a counterterrorism bill during April. The Senate is currently deliberating on a different draft counterterrorism bill.

¶14. (U) The United States and the Philippine government signed a bilateral Extradition Treaty in 1996. The treaty gives precedence to the Philippine government for the prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment of Filipino criminals apprehended in the Philippines, but the Philippine

government has routinely issued arrest warrants for Filipino nationals whom the U.S. has sought on terrorism charges. The Philippine government did not extradite or request extradition of terrorists for prosecution during 2006.

¶15. (U) The Philippine government does not offer any support for terrorists either within or outside its borders.

¶16. (U) The Philippine government consistently supports the United States in United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council matters related to terrorism.

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SANCTUARY (SAFE HAVEN) ASSESSMENT  
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¶17. (U) The Philippine government launched intensive civil-military operations in January to eliminate terrorist safe havens within the Sulu Archipelago. Balikatan Exercises and a visit by the USS Mercy supported the Philippine government's campaign to separate terrorists from the general population and diminish support for their cause.

¶18. (U) The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), with U.S. intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance support, launched "Operation Ultimatum" on August 1 to capture the top five ASG and JI leaders on the island of Jolo: Khadaffy Janjalani; Isnilon Hapilon; Abu Solaiman; Umar Patek; and, Dulmatin. The Philippine Navy established a tight maritime cordon around Jolo and has conducted over 4,300 interdictions during this ongoing operation.

¶19. (U) The Philippine government is aware that some JI members have obtained safe haven in Mindanao and is actively engaged in efforts to capture them. There is an Ad Hoc Joint Action Group under which the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front cooperate against terrorists and criminals in Mindanao.

¶20. (U) Philippine military and law enforcement at the regional and provincial level work closely with U.S. Embassy counterparts and visiting military personnel to ensure counterterrorism force protection to more than 25 annual bilateral military events. In 2006, U.S. and Philippine military and law enforcement officials cooperated against JI and ASG targets, with U.S. officials actively assisting in investigating and pre-empting several terrorist attacks. Members of Joint Special Operations Task Force - Philippines in the southern Philippines are involved in civil-military operations and intelligence fusion to help the AFP develop a sustained counterterrorism capability. The Embassy's law enforcement team maintains regular contact with police and security counterparts. Mission received excellent levels of cooperation from Philippine law enforcement officials in

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obtaining access to terrorist detainees and witnesses for FBI interviews, and access to criminal, immigration, financial, and biographic records via the mechanisms established in the U.S.- Philippine Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security is improving the capability of Philippine agencies to respond to terrorist threats through an in-country Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program.

¶21. (U) Neither the proliferation nor the trafficking of weapons of mass destruction plays a role in terrorism in the Philippines, though the Philippine National Intelligence Coordinating Agency remains concerned about possible future developments.

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TERRORIST GROUPS  
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¶22. (U) Embassy has no information suggesting that any

foreign government provides financial support, military or paramilitary training, weapons, diplomatic recognition, or sanctuary from prosecution to terrorist groups operating in the Philippines.

¶23. (U) The Philippine government considers the NPA as the greatest threat to security of the Philippines and declared "all out war" against the Communist insurgents. The AFP requested a \$620 million budget for 2007 from the Philippine Congress to support its campaign to crush the 38-year old Communist insurgency by 2010. The NPA, with an estimated strength of 6,828 members, has killed over 840 civilians and 360 soldiers and police officers since January 2000, according to the AFP.

¶24. (U) A major recent trend is growing cooperation among members of the JI, ASG, and RSM.

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FOREIGN GOVERNMENT COOPERATION  
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¶25. (U) The Philippines cooperates fully with the United States on bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism efforts. In April, the two governments established the U.S. - Philippine Security Engagement Board (SEB) -- modeled after the bilateral Mutual Defense Board -- to deal with non-traditional security issues, including counterterrorism and maritime security. This watershed agreement set the stage for the "Kapit Bisig" (Shoulder-to-Shoulder) counterterrorism framework that focuses on civil affairs, capability upgrades, and support for AFP operations.

¶26. (U) The United States is assisting the Philippines in the establishment of an interagency intelligence fusion center in Zamboanga City that will support maritime interdictions against transnational criminal/terrorist organizations as well as a "Coast Watch" system in Mindanao, with Australian assistance. Other centers will eventually be in Palawan, General Santos City, and Davao.

¶27. (U) Despite plans dating back to 2001, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) does not yet have a digitized, machine-readable passport. While the Philippines cooperates with USG requests for prosecutions for persons who tamper or alter travel documents, the prosecutions carry low level penalties. In addition, there is a reluctance to investigate or charge vendors or users of false documents when the Philippine government is not the issuing authority.

¶28. (U) Embassy Manila's POC for the 2006 Terrorism Report is Political Officer Stephen Worobec (worobecSF@state.gov), telephone 528-6300, ext 2288.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

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